



RICHARD J. CODEY
ACTING GOVERNOR

STATE OF NEW JERSEY
DEPARTMENT OF PERSONNEL

ROLANDO TORRES, JR.
ACTING COMMISSIONER

FOR RELEASE:

January 24, 2005

CONTACT:

Ester Rodriguez
(609) 292-6219

MERIT SYSTEM RULES WILL INCLUDE RIGHTS OF DOMESTIC PARTNERS

Ruling of the State Merit System Board Enacts Changes Due to Domestic Partnership Act

TRENTON—At the January 12th Merit System Board meeting, rule amendments were adopted to make civil service policies consistent with New Jersey's Domestic Partnership Act (L.2003, c.246). The Merit System Board ruled that merit system regulations should reflect the rights of domestic partners, effective February 22, 2005.

The Merit System Board, under the auspices of the New Jersey Department of Personnel, hears and rules on appeals filed by State, county, and municipal merit system employees, candidates for employment, and appointing authorities. The Board is also charged with interpreting merit system rules, as well as amending and adopting new rules.

The Domestic Partnership Act, which went into effect July 10, 2004, protects same-gender couples who have entered into domestic partnerships. Individuals of the same or the opposite gender, who meet a series of criteria - including cohabitation and joint finances - are eligible to apply for status as domestic partners. The prescribed policy affects the individual's tax, health, pension and retirement benefits.

One of the rule amendments provides that a domestic partner is a member of the immediate family. This means that a test candidate may be eligible for a make-up examination due to the illness or death of a domestic partner. Civil service employees are entitled to use sick leave for the care of an immediate family member, which will now include a domestic partner.

"As a result of the Merit System Board's decision to adopt these amendments, we are helping to ensure that equal employment rights will be guaranteed to all individuals - regardless of their sexual orientation and domestic partnership status," said Acting Commissioner of Personnel Rolando Torres, Jr.

The Commissioner of the New Jersey Department of Personnel chairs the Merit System Board—a five member, bipartisan, public body. Joining Acting Commissioner Torres are four part-time members, each appointed to a four-year term by the Governor with the consent of the State Senate.

###

The mission of the New Jersey Department of Personnel is to attract, develop and retain a high quality workforce for State, county and municipal governments and to partner with management and labor to develop a fair, efficient human resource delivery system rewarding quality, merit, and productivity.